

Kathryn Stockett Biography

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Detroit Gale 2010.
Literature Resource Center.



Born in 1969 in Jackson, Mississippi, writer and editor Kathryn Stockett earned her undergraduate degree in English and creative writing from the University of Alabama, then headed to New York City with plans to work in publishing. She spent nine years there, working both in magazine publishing and in marketing, before moving to Atlanta, Georgia, where she lives with her husband and daughter. Since moving back to the South, Stockett has been focusing on writing for herself, having shifted her attention to fiction. Her debut novel, *The Help*, was pub-

lished by Amy Einhorn Books in 2009, and proved to be one of the hit books of the summer season.

The Help garnered instant attention due to its unusual and rarely addressed subject matter: the relationship in the South between white families and the domestic servants, who were primarily black, whom they employed in their homes during the 1960s. Having grown up during this period in Mississippi, Stockett was familiar with the dynamic, but nervous about addressing it in a novel, understanding that it was a controversial subject and could result in criticism from both reviewers and from general readers. In an interview with a writer for *Bookreporter* Web site, Stockett explained her attitude as a child: "Growing up in Mississippi, almost every family I knew had a black woman working in their house—cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the white children. That was life in Mississippi. I was young and assumed that's how most of America lived." Only after she moved north did Stockett realize that she had grown up in a microcosm, and that her memories of her childhood were not of a universal experience. She found herself reminiscing with other Southerners she met in New York, trading stories about growing up with black domestic help. Gradually, those memories began to spark an idea and she decided to write a story about her relationship with her family's maid when she was a child.

Early on in the writing process, Stockett chose to frame her narrative from the point of view of a black maid. It seemed logical, and she had no qualms

about her choice because at the time she did not believe anyone else would ever read the story. Only when she reached the stage of getting friends to look at her work did she start to get nervous about how she had portrayed the characters and whether their voices rang true. Stockett told the interviewer for *Bookreporter* Web site: "I'll never know what it really felt like to be in the shoes of those black women who worked in the white homes of the South during the 1960s and I hope that no one thinks I presume to know that."

Book Summary

Source: www.Litlovers.com

Be prepared to meet three unforgettable women:

Twenty-two-year-old Skeeter has just returned home after graduating from Ole Miss. She may have a degree, but it is 1962, Mississippi, and her mother will not be happy till Skeeter has a ring on her finger. Skeeter would normally find solace with her beloved maid Constantine, the woman who raised her, but Constantine has disappeared and no one will tell Skeeter where she has gone.

Aibileen is a black maid, a wise, regal woman raising her seventeenth white child. Something has shifted inside her after the loss of her own son, who died while his bosses looked the other way. She is devoted to the little girl she looks after, though she knows both their hearts may be broken.

Minny, Aibileen's best friend, is short, fat, and perhaps the sassiest woman in Mississippi. She can cook like nobody's business, but she can't mind her tongue, so she's lost yet another job. Minny finally finds a position working for someone too new to town to know her reputation. But her new boss has secrets of her own.

Seemingly as different from one another as can be, these women will nonetheless come together for a clandestine project that will put them all at risk. And why? Because they are suffocating within the lines that define their town and their times. And sometimes lines are made to be crossed.

In pitch-perfect voices, Kathryn Stockett creates three extraordinary women whose determination to start a movement of their own forever changes a town, and the way women—mothers, daughters, caregivers, friends—view one another. A deeply moving novel filled with poignancy, humor, and hope, *The Help* is a timeless and universal story about the lines we abide by, and the ones we don't.

Discussion Questions

Source: www.LitLovers.com

1. Who was your favorite character? Why?
2. What do you think motivated Hilly? On one hand she's so unpleasant to Aibileen and her own help, as well as to Skeeter once she realizes she can't control her. But she's a wonderful mother. Do you think you can be a good mother but at the same time a deeply flawed person?
3. Like Hilly, Skeeter's mother is a prime example of someone deeply flawed yet somewhat sympathetic. She seems to care for Skeeter – and she also seems to have very real feelings for Constantine. Yet the ultimatum she gives to Constantine is untenable. And most of her interaction with Skeeter is critical. Do you think Skeeter's mother is a sympathetic or unsympathetic character? Why?
4. How much of a person's character do you think is shaped by the times in which they live?
5. Did it bother you that Skeeter is willing to overlook so many of Stuart's faults so that she can get married, and it's not until he literally gets up and walks away that the engagement falls apart?
6. Do you think Minny was justified in her distrust of white people?
7. Do you think that had Aibileen stayed working for Miss Elizabeth, that Mae Mobley would have grown up to be racist like her mother? Do you think racism is inherent, or taught?
8. From the perspective of a 21st century reader, the hair shellac system that Skeeter undergoes seems ludicrous. Yet women still alter their looks in rather peculiar ways as the definition of "beauty" changes with the times. Looking back on your past, what's the most ridiculous beauty regimen you ever underwent?
9. The author manages to paint Aibileen with a quiet grace and an aura of wisdom about her. How do you think she does this?
10. Do you think there are still vestiges of racism in relationships where people of color work for people who are white? Have you heard stories of someone who put away their valuable jewelry before their nanny comes – so they trust this person to look after their child, but not their diamond rings?
11. What did you think about Minny's pie for Miss Hilly? Would you have gone as far as Minny did for revenge?



The Help by Kathryn Stockett



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The Help

Contents and Sign-out Sheet

Kits include one bag, 10 books, and a pocket folder of materials.
Use this sign-out sheet to keep track of who takes which copy of the book. Groups may keep the folder when returning the books and bag.

Copy	Name	Returned
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Due Date:



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